

Rock Island Arsenal  
Guard House  
(Building 321)  
Rodman Avenue and Rock Island Avenue  
Rock Island  
Rock Island County  
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1001DD

HABS  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL  
GUARD HOUSE  
(Building 321)

HABS No. IL-1001D

Location:

Rodman Avenue and Rock Island Avenue,  
Rock Island Arsenal,  
Rock Island,  
Rock Island County, Illinois

USGS Davenport East Quadrangle,  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
15.7034100.4599850

Present Owner and Occupant:

U.S. Army

Present Use:

Security office

Significance:

After taking command of Rock Island Arsenal in 1865, General Thomas Jefferson Rodman devised a master plan for the installation calling for the construction of ten large manufacturing shops, five on each side of the island's major east-west thoroughfare. These core manufacturing structures were supplemented by a variety of administrative, residential, maintenance, storage, and utility buildings. Although only a few buildings were erected prior to Rodman's death in 1871, subsequent construction under Rodman's nineteenth-century successors closely conformed to the original plan.

Representing one of the largest military construction projects of the late nineteenth century, the various facilities constructed under the Rodman plan are a unique example of military installation planning, design, and construction. In addition to their architectural importance, they constitute the administrative and technological core of Rock Island Arsenal, one of only two "old-line," nineteenth-century arsenals still in operation for munitions production. The buildings are vital for understanding the history of American ordnance development and manufacture from the Spanish American War to the present.

Located on the western end of the island, the Guard House was erected in 1875 to serve as a security check point for visitors

ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL  
GUARD HOUSE  
(Building 321)  
HABS No. IL-1001D (Page 2)

entering the arsenal from Davenport, Iowa. The only Gothic Revival structure built under the Rodman plan, the building displays carefully crafted, detailing that is thoroughly in keeping with its diminutive size. It is part of the Rock Island Arsenal National Register Historic District.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: According to Colonel Daniel Webster Flagler, who succeeded General Thomas Jefferson Rodman as commandant in 1871, the "entrance gates and guard house . . . were built in 1875" (Flagler, p. 272).
2. Architect: Not known. Plans were prepared by Ordnance Department staff under the supervision of Flagler (Flagler, p. 260).
3. Original and subsequent owners: U.S. Army.
4. Builder: "All of the work . . . was done by day workmen, employed and paid by the Government. The work was directed and superintended directly by officers of the Ordnance Department stationed at the arsenal, and the necessary engineering work, calculations, making of tests, experiments, etc., was also done by the officers" (Flagler, p. 260).
5. Original plans and construction: The Rock Island Arsenal Engineering Plans and Services Division has a photostatic copy of an original plan view dated 1874, and an original drawing of the side and front elevations, dated 1874 (see HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-6). Both documents are signed "D. W. Flagler." The elevations show a shed-roofed front porch, which apparently was not included in the original construction. This feature does not appear in a photograph (see HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-5) dated "about 1876," which otherwise shows the building as originally planned. The photograph is in the picture collection of the Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. The present building has composition roofing rather than the original variegated slate roofing and it lacks the original gingerbread, finials, and chimney.
6. Alterations and additions: Before 1900, a shed-roofed porch was added to the front facade. This feature appears in a photograph

ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL  
GUARD HOUSE  
(Building 321)  
HABS No. IL-1001D (Page 3)

dated "ca. 1900" in the picture collection of the Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. At undetermined dates, the front-porch addition was removed along with the building's original gingerbread, finials, and slate roofing, and the original chimney was replaced with the present chimney.

B. Historical Context:

The Guard House was constructed in 1875 on the western end of the island to serve as a security check point. After a new guard station was constructed following World War II, the building was converted into a small storage facility. It has been designated as "Building 321" at least since World War II ("Industrial Facilities Inventory"). (For further documentation, see HAER No. IL-20.)

Prepared by: Jeffrey A. Hess  
MacDonald and Mack Partnership  
February 1985

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is a small, limestone, Gothic Revival style, one-and-one-half story guardhouse. It is the only building at the arsenal in this style and, although missing much of its original ornamentation, remains a prominent building, partially as a result of its siting near the western terminus of Rodman Avenue.
2. Condition of fabric: Having lost many of its original ornamental features and suffering from rising damp, the building is in fair condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The rectangular building measures 19' x 24' with a two-bay front elevation in the narrower, gable end of the building. It is one-and-one-half stories in height with an inaccessible attic and without a basement.
2. Foundations: Rock-faced ashlar limestone below a cut limestone water table (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-2).
3. Walls: Rock-faced ashlar limestone (HABS Photo Nos. IL-1001D-1 and IL-1001D-2).

ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL  
GUARD HOUSE  
(Building 321)  
HABS No. IL-1001D (Page 4)

4. Structural systems: Brick bearing walls with an ashlar limestone facing. The floor system is modern sawn wood joists, which replace original sawn wood joists lost to rot. The roof system is unknown as it is inaccessible. It can be safely assumed to be sawn wood joists, as well.
5. Chimneys: There is one small, square, tan brick chimney (HABS Photo Nos. IL-1001D-1 and IL-1001D-2) near the center of the roof with a corbelled brick cap.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: There is one doorway (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-1) located near the east end of the south elevation. It contains a vertical board door (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-3) fitted to the pointed Gothic arch opening. The interior face of the door (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-4) has a plain wood frame forming two panels. The opening has a cut limestone Gothic arch label, rock-faced ashlar limestone jambs, and a concrete sill.
  - b. Windows: Single window openings (HABS Photo Nos. IL-1001D-1 and IL-1001D-2) are located west of the doorway and centered in the east and west elevations. The three openings are similar in construction to the doorway, with each having a cut limestone pointed Gothic arch label, rock-faced ashlar limestone jambs, and a projecting, flat, cut limestone sill block. Each contains a two-light, wood casement sash. Centered in the south gable end is a round window opening (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-1) containing a six-light, trefoil, fixed wood sash in a smooth, round, cut limestone opening. Centered in the north elevation is a set of three small ventilation openings (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-2) with the center opening higher than the others. Otherwise equal, each has rock-faced ashlar limestone jambs, sills, and pointed, triangular heads.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The roof (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-2) is a steeply-pitched gable with a ridge running north-south. It is covered with asphalt shingling. Original roof ridges and finials are no longer extant.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice and eaves (HABS Photo Nos. IL-1001D-1 and IL-1001D-2) are widely projecting wood with molded edges. Original vergeboards and decorative trimwork are no longer extant. The surviving woodwork is painted tan to match the limestone.

ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL  
GUARD HOUSE  
(Building 321)  
HABS No. IL-1001D (Page 5)

C. Interior Description:

1. Floor plans: The floor plan consists of a large room in the south end of the building from which open two small rooms at the north. The northeast room is fitted as a restroom, although no longer operable as such.
2. Flooring: The existing flooring (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-4) is unfinished plywood which probably replaced the original wood floor, which probably had deteriorated from moisture problems.
3. Wall and ceiling finishes: The outer walls (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-4) are painted brick and the interior walls and ceilings (HABS IL-1001D-4) are painted plaster.
4. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Both doorways are identical. Each contains a plain wood casing with a board door having vertical boards on its south face and diagonal boards on its north face.
  - b. Windows: The first-floor window openings (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-4) each have a pointed, brick, Gothic arch, brick jamb, and a wood sill. The south gable window is inaccessible from the interior.
5. Hardware: The exterior face of the front door retains an elaborate strap hinge (HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-3). The door, itself, is hung on a pair of cast-iron hinges identical to those used on the interior doors and the window sash. The front door retains its original knob set, having an elaborate exterior plate. Non-historic round brass knobs are used on all interior doors.
6. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: No evidence remains of the original heating system, presumably a wood stove. At present there is no heating system.
  - b. Lighting: Single incandescent fixtures are centered on the ceilings of each room. No evidence remains of original lighting systems.
  - c. Plumbing: No original plumbing fixtures survive.

ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL  
GUARD HOUSE  
(Building 321)  
HABS No. IL-1001D (Page 6)

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The building is located near the west end of Rodman Avenue, the arsenal's principal street. It fronts directly on the north sidewalk of the avenue. To its north, the land slopes downward to the nearby Mississippi River. The landscape has a residential aspect, with mowed lawns and mature trees. Rock-faced ashlar gate posts are located near the building. An effective contrast to the small Gothic sentry station is the nearby Clock Tower Building, an immense, late Greek Revival building south and west of the Sentry Station.

Prepared by: David Arbogast  
Architectural Conservator  
February 1985

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

The Rock Island Arsenal Engineering Plans and Services Division has an untitled, original architectural drawing, dated 1874 and signed by "D. W. Flagler." It is numbered "D40018E" (see HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-6). The front porch shown in the drawing was apparently not included in the original construction. The same office also has a photostatic copy of an original plan view entitled "Plan of Main Entrance Gates & Guard House / Rock Island Arsenal / 1874." This document is in an untitled binder containing photostatic plans of the arsenal's buildings.

B. Early Views:

A photograph (see HABS Photo No. IL-1001D-5) in the picture collection of the Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office shows the building shortly after construction without the front porch specified in the original elevations; it is captioned on the front "Main Gate of Rock Island Arsenal Looking East / Taken About 1876." The same collection has an uncaptioned photograph showing the building with a front porch; its accompanying negative envelop is captioned "ca. 1900."

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Hess, Jeffrey A., and Mack, Robert C. "Historic Properties Report Rock Island Arsenal, Rock Island, Illinois". Prepared

ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL  
GUARD HOUSE  
(Building 321)  
HABS No. IL-1001D (Page 7)

by MacDonald and Mack Partnership, and Building Technology Incorporated for the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1985. The report, with accompanying inventory cards, is filed as field records in the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, under HAER No. IL-20.

"Industrial Facilities Inventory, Rock Island Arsenal."  
Prepared by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, 1946. Rock Island Arsenal Engineering Plans and Services Division. Lists building as "Building 321."  
Real Property Cards, Rock Island Arsenal Engineering Plans and Services Division. Briefly describes building's structural characteristics and provides sketchy history of maintenance operations.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Bouilly, Robert. "Arsenal Island." Joined by a River: Quad Cities, ed. Frederick I. Anderson. N. pl.: Lee Enterprises, Incorporated, 1982. Excellent historical analysis of the arsenal's development to about 1910, written by a historian in the Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office.

Flagler, D[aniel] W[ebster]. A History of the Rock Island Arsenal from Its Establishment in 1863 to December 1876. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1877. Provides detailed description of original Rodman plan for the arsenal and establishes construction date for the Guard House.

Nothstein, Ira O. and Stephens, Clifford W. A History of Rock Island Arsenal from Earliest Times to 1954. Rock Island: U.S. Army, Rock Island Arsenal, 1965. 3 vols. Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. The best account of the arsenal's general operations.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Record Group 156 at the National Archives contains correspondence on the construction and operation of Rock Island Arsenal from 1871 to 1903. This material is also available on 216 reels of microfilm at the Browning Museum, Rock Island Arsenal.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was part of a program initiated through a memorandum of agreement between the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of the Army.



ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL  
GUARD HOUSE  
(Building 321)  
HABS No. IL-1001D (Page 8)

Stanley J. Fried, Chief, Real Estate Branch of Headquarters DARCOM, and Dr. Robert J. Kapsch, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, were program directors. Sally Kress Tompkins of HABS/HAER was program manager, and Robie S. Lange of HABS/HAER was project manager. Building Technology Incorporated, Silver Spring, Maryland, under the direction of William A. Brenner, acted as primary contractor, and MacDonald and Mack Partnership, Minneapolis, was a major subcontractor. The project included a survey of historic properties at Rock Island Arsenal, as well as preparation of an historic properties report and HABS/HAER documentation for 38 buildings. The survey, report, and documentation were completed by Jeffrey A. Hess, historian, Minneapolis; Barbara E. Hightower, historian, Minneapolis; David Arbogast, architectural historian, Iowa City, Iowa; and Robert C. Mack, architect, Minneapolis. The photographs were taken by Robert A. Ryan, J. Ceronie, and Bruce A. Harms of Dennett, Muessig, Ryan, and Associates, Ltd., Iowa City, Iowa. Drawings were produced by John Palmer Low, Minneapolis.